

Hello my Name is Lily Buren and I am a freshman at Middlebury College, but I am a Brattleboro resident and constituent. Prior to coming to Middlebury, I was very involved in Brattleboro town politics as a young person. Last year I served as the temporary chair of the Brattleboro Democratic party and worked throughout high school on various political issues that held special importance to me. Including in 2021 testifying in support of S.30, a bill proposing to ban firearms at hospitals, government buildings, and childcare facilities. In 2021 I was 17 years old. At 17 I was old enough to testify on a state bill but I was not old enough to vote in my own town election. In 2022 I attended a national committee hosted virtually by the League of Women Voters to advocate for lowering the voting age nationwide. I want to assure you that I am not advocating for that today. At the time I was freshly 18 but the point still stands that I was a politically aware young person, using my voice to make a change in any way that I could.

I was not involved in the original efforts to pass the Brattleboro Youth Vote, beyond attending one meeting in the back of the Brooks Memorial Library at age 12 where I listened to a group of slightly older teenagers draft the beginnings of the town charter. The town charter passed in Brattleboro on March 5th, 2019. The charter passed with 69% support four years after losing 42-58% in 2015. A week before the governor vetoed the bill in 2022 I rallied 300 students and members of the community to send messages to the governor explaining why they believed he should sign the bill. Even after he vetoed the bill, I continued to write to legislators in hopes of overriding the veto. On March 11th I traveled to the statehouse to celebrate the house's vote to overturn the veto. This marked the 11th time the House overturned a governor's veto in Vermont history. While it was discouraging to see that the Senate voted to support the governor's veto I do not think it should hinder young people from fighting for their right to vote.

Lowering the voting age can lead to a long-term increase in voter turnout and push citizens to be more aware of the role of government at a younger age. Furthermore, 16-and 17-year-olds have the necessary civil knowledge to vote independently and responsibly. Youth are directly affected by local political issues as much as anyone else and should have a say in the workings of their local government. Starting at 16, youth can work without a limit on hours, pay taxes on their income, operate a vehicle, and even be tried as an adult in court. Lowering the voting age would empower young voters to listen and address the concerns of their youth constituents and encourage long-term civic engagement.

I also brought voting turnout in our Annual town meeting during 2020, 2022, and 2023 in hopes of showing how it has changed in recent years as a result of covid. (Show Findings). This indicates that while voter turnout has improved since covid it is still lower than before covid. How does this relate to youth voting? It is no secret that young families have started flocking to Vermont since covid in hopes of seeking a sense of outdoor adventure and or a better quality of life (see UsNews&World Report, Vermont Public, Vermont Digger, and Seven Days). I believe that if the town charter were to pass our voter turnout numbers would continue to go up and it would continue to encourage younger families to move to Brattleboro and at large our state.